How to Build a GCC in 2026: 5 Strategic Decisions Every CEO Must Make

For decades, enterprises expanding globally faced a familiar choice: build local operations, outsource functions, or establish a Global Capability Centre (GCC). In 2026, that decision has become significantly more strategic. As talent shortages intensify, operating costs fluctuate, and growth expectations accelerate; the way enterprises are building and scaling global capabilities, can directly influence competitiveness.

This is why GCCs are not viewed simply as offshore delivery hubs. They have emerged as critical components of a broader global expansion strategy, enabling enterprises to access specialised talent, strengthen enterprise operations, accelerate digital transformation, and create scalable business capabilities across regions.

Yet, building a successful GCC requires far more than selecting a location and hiring talent. Decisions around operating models, governance, capability scope, leadership, and scalability will determine whether the GCC becomes a strategic growth engine or another layer of operational complexity.

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GCC Setup in 2026: Traditional vs Strategic Approach

Criteria	Traditional Approach	Strategic Approach
Entry Point	Selecting location	Identifying business objectives
Primary Focus	Cost arbitrage	Capability creation
Planning Basis	Around headcount targets	Around business outcomes
Talent Strategy	Hire first, define scope later	Define capabilities before hiring
Role of GCC	As a delivery centre	As an extension of enterprise operations
Success Metric	Through cost savings	Through business impact, resilience, and scalability
Operating Model	Build infrastructure first	Design operating model first
Scaling Method	Through people	Through people, process, and technology

5 Critical GCC Decisions Every CEO Must Make

This shift in thinking is precisely why GCC success today, depends less on infrastructure and more on strategic decision-making. The first decision is perhaps the most important.

1. Define Why the GCC Exists

Only about one-third of enterprises that recently set up or significantly changed their GCCs report a meaningful improvement in quality and business outcomes; most of the others struggle due to weak strategic clarity and alignment.

Needless to say, a high-impact GCC must be anchored in clear strategic intent and tightly linked to the enterprise's long-term business objectives, not treated as a standalone offshore unit. Before you design the model or pick a location, you need to answer a set of foundational questions:

- Is the primary objective cost optimization and structural efficiency?
- Is the organization seeking access to specialized skills or scarce digital talent?
- Will the GCC be a catalyst for digital transformation and innovation?
- Is it expected to operate as a global delivery hub for enterprise operations?
- Is it a core pillar of the company's broader global expansion strategy?

These answers shape every downstream decision; from where you set up, to which functions you transition first, to how you design governance, leadership, and performance metrics. When the GCC's mandate is explicitly aligned with enterprise priorities, it earns faster buy-in from business leaders, secures better investment, and is far more likely to deliver sustained, long-term strategic value.

2. Choose the Right Business Operating Model

Once you are clear on why the GCC exists, you need to decide **how** it will be structured and scaled. In 2026, enterprises have a spectrum of operating models rather than a single "captive only" choice.

At one end is the **captive GCC**, where the enterprise builds and runs its own centre as an internal entity, embedding it deeply into the business operating model and long-term capability plans. Nearby sit BOT **(Build-Operate-Transfer)** and **BOA (Build-Operate-Assist)** models, where a specialist partner helps design and operate the GCC for a period – either with a clear transfer plan (BOT) or as a longer-term co-managed construct (BOA) that supports steady capability build-up.

Enterprises looking for even more agility are experimenting with **GCC-as-a-Service**, where a strategic outsourcing advisory partner provides dedicated teams, infrastructure, and governance without immediate entity setup. Alongside this, nano GCCs and **micro GCCs** are emerging as smaller, focused centres built around specific products, domains, or regions, allowing enterprises to test and scale GCC footprints in modular steps.

Most companies move through a combination of these models over time, choosing the structure that best matches their growth ambitions, risk appetite, investment capacity, and speed-to-market needs at each stage of their GCC journey.

3. Determine What Functions Should Move First

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Not every function should be moved into a newly established GCC on day one. Forward-thinking enterprises are taking a phased approach, starting with functions that have clear processes, measurable outcomes, and strong documentation.

Typical first-wave functions include:

- Finance and Accounting
- Business Process Management (BPM)
- Marketing Operations
- IT Support and Technology Services
- Human Resources Operations
- Data Management and Analytics

Once the GCC has stabilised and earned internal credibility, enterprises gradually add higher-value and more strategic work, such as:

- Digital transformation initiatives
- Product development and engineering support
- Advanced analytics and data science
- Process excellence and intelligent automation
- Strategic business services and centre-led innovation

The goal is not to simply relocate existing work but to systematically build capability – elevating the GCC from an execution arm to a core engine of enterprise value over time.

4. Build a Talent Strategy Before You Build the Centre

Access to talent is often the primary driver behind GCC investments, and one of the biggest determinants of their long-term success. Yet many enterprises treat talent planning as a downstream activity. In reality, a scalable talent strategy should be established before the centre is built, not after.

Focus on four essentials:

- **Workforce planning** – Define which capabilities and roles you will build in the GCC over the next 3-5 years.
- **Leadership hiring** – Bring in experienced local leaders who can connect enterprise goals with on-ground execution.
- **Employer branding** – Articulate a clear value proposition that makes your GCC attractive in a crowded talent market.
- **Career development** – Create visible growth paths and learning opportunities to retain and deepen critical skills.

When talent is treated as a strategic capability rather than a staffing exercise, GCCs become more scalable, resilient, and impactful over the long term.

5. Establish Governance from Day One

Many GCCs don't struggle because of talent or infrastructure; they struggle because governance comes in too late. Effective governance must be designed upfront so the centre has clear ownership, decision rights, and ways to demonstrate impact.

From day one, put in place: defined leadership structures, a service delivery framework, KPIs and SLAs, financial and compliance controls, and clear communication and escalation protocols.

When these elements are embedded early, the GCC operates as a seamless extension of enterprise operations, not a distant offshore unit.

The Future of GCC Setup: Beyond Traditional Models

As enterprise operating models evolve, GCC strategies are also shifting beyond the classic "outsourcing vs captive" choice. Today, more enterprises are adopting flexible, hybrid models that blend dedicated teams, embedded governance, scalable infrastructure, and structured transition pathways. In India alone, over 2,100 GCCs now employ more than 2 million professionals, and a growing share of new setups are hybrid or partner-led rather than purely captive.

This new wave includes micro and nano GCCs, hub-and-spoke networks, and AI-first centres that can be stood up quickly and scaled in stages, rather than as one large monolithic build. The emphasis is shifting from ownership structure alone to outcomes, scalability, speed of execution, and the ability to plug into evolving global expansion strategies.

Conclusion

Building a Global Capability Centre in 2026 requires more than infrastructure and talent – it requires the right strategy. Enterprises that align GCC decisions with their broader global expansion strategy are better positioned to create scalable capabilities, strengthen enterprise operations, and deliver long-term business value.

At IMS OneWorld, we enable enterprises navigate this journey through flexible GCC enablement models, embedded governance, and scalable delivery ecosystems that accelerate setup while maintaining strategic control.

The right GCC strategy starts with the right conversation. Talk to our team about building a model that supports your enterprise goals today and scales with your ambitions tomorrow.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Global Capability Center (GCC)?

A Global Capability Center is a dedicated operational hub established by an enterprise to support business functions such as finance, IT, HR, analytics, customer operations, and other strategic capabilities.

How long does it take to build a GCC?

Traditional captive GCC setups can take 12–24 months depending on location, hiring, infrastructure, and governance requirements. Partner-led models can significantly reduce implementation timelines.

What functions should be moved to a GCC first?

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Enterprises typically begin with Finance & Accounting, BPM, Marketing Operations, HR, and IT support functions before expanding into higher-value strategic capabilities.

How does a GCC support global expansion?

A GCC provides access to talent, operational scalability, business continuity, and specialized capabilities that support growth across international markets.

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